

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 SANTIAGO 5598

E. O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PGOV, CI
SUBJECT: PINOCHET, LEIGH AND PINOCHETISMO -- SOME THOUGHTS

REFS: (A) SANTIAGO 5552, (B) SANTIAGO 5477, (C) SANTIAGO 5467

1. SUMMARY: PINOCHET CAME OUT AHEAD IN THE SHOW-DOWN WITH LEIGH BY MOVING DECISIVELY AND BY EXPLOITING THE ISSUES OF NATIONAL SECURITY, POLITICAL REVIVAL, AND FOREIGN INTERVENTION. THE PREDOMINANT VIEW HERE IS THAT HE IS STRONGER, AND HAS marginally IMPROVED HIS CHANCES TO SURVIVE AS PRESIDENT BY HAVING A UNIFIED JUNTA IN PLACE TO FACE THE LETELIER INDICTMENTS. THE MINORITY VIEW IS THAT THE LEIGH OUSTER WAS A SIGN OF THE GROWING WEAKNESS OF THE REGIME AND THAT, HAVING SPLIT THE BASIC UNITY OF THE ARMED FORCES, PINOCHET'S DEPARTURE BECOMES MORE LIKELY. WE FIND THE FIRST MORE CONVINCING BUT WE SEE SUBSTANTIAL POSSIBLITY THAT PINOCHET WILL QUICKLY NULLIFY HIS RECENT GAIN BY INSENSITIVITY TO DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL OPINION. AFTER PAST VICTORIES, PINOCHET HAS BECOME TOUGHER WITH HIS OPPOSITION. PINOCHETISMO REMAINS A SERIOUS POSSIBLITY. END SUMMARY.

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2. THE PINOCHET VICTORY THEORY. BE GETTING RID OF GENERAL LEIGH, PINOCHET ELIMINATED HIS ONLY SERIOUS CRITIC AND RIVAL WITHIN THE JUNTA. IN DOING SO, HE DEMONSTRATED ONCE AGAIN THAT HE IS A POLITICAL TACTICIAN OF CONSIDERABLE SKILL AND, FOR THE MILLIONS OF CHILEANS WHO ARE SUPPOSED TO HAVE A SUBLIMINAL YEARNING FOR A STRONG LEADER, HE APPARENTLY PROVED THAT HE IS VERY MUCH IN CHARGE. ALSO, THE REMOVAL OF LEIGH HAS AT LEAST ONE IMMEDIATE PRACTICAL VALUE:

REPORTEDLY, LEIGH WAS HOLDING UP ISSUANCE OF LEGISLATION TO "NORMALIZE" THE SITUATION OF RELATIVES OF DISAPPEARED PERSONS. THE GOC HOPES THAT SUCH LEGISLATION WILL REDUCE THE INTENSITY OF THE MISSING PERSONS ISSUE IN DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL DEBATE.

3. IN GETTING RID OF LEIGH, PINOCHET EXPLOITED THREE THEMES THAT HAVE UNDENIABLE RESONANCE FOR MANY CHILEANS. LEIGH WAS MADE TO APPEAR A THREAT TO NATIONAL SECURITY AT A TIME WHEN THERE IS DANGER OF CONFLICT WITH ARGENTINA IN THE SOUTH AND WITH PERU AND BOLIVIA IN THE NORTH. BECAUSE LEIGH HAD CHOSEN AN ITALIAN NEWSPAPER FOR HIS MOST RECENT INTERVIEW, IT WAS POSSIBLE TO PROJECT HIM AS ENCOURAGING INTERVENTION IN INTERNAL PROBLEMS. THIRD, AND MORE BY WHISPER CAMPAIGN THAN GOC MEDIA RELEASES, LEIGH WAS LINKED TO THE POLITICAL PARTIES AND THE IMPRESSION WAS GIVEN THAT HE FAVORED AN EARLY RETURN TO OPEN POLITICAL ACTIVITY. THERE WERE, FOR EXAMPLE, RUMORS JULY 24 THAT THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS WOULD COME OUT WITH A DENUNCIATION SAYING THAT LEIGH HAD BEEN MEETING WITH LEADERS OF THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC PARTY (PDC), THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY (PIR/PSD) AND WITH THE AMERICAN AMBASSADOR. (COMMENT: THE AMBASSADOR CALLED FOREIGN MINISTER CUBILLOS JULY 24 AND WAS ASSURED THE COUNCIL PLANNED NO SUCH RELEASE.) WE CAN EXPECT PINOCHET TO CONTINUE TO PRESS THESE THREE THEMES IN THE WEEKS AHEAD AS THE LETELIER CASE REGAINS THE HEADLINES.

4. THE PYRRHIC VICTORY THEORY. THERE IS A MINORITY VIEW ABOUT --
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THAT PINOCHET'S VICTORY WAS TEMPORARY AT BEST AND THAT FIRST AND FOREMOST THE OUSTER OF LEIGH AND THE DEPARTURE OF 18 OTHER AIR FORCE GENERALS INDICATES THE GROWING WEAKNESS OF THIS REGIME. THE RUMORS CIRCULATING SANTIAGO THE PAST TWO DAYS -- THAT OTHER ADMIRALS AND GENERALS WILL RESIGN IN PROTEST OVER THE LEIGH OUSTER -- FLOW FROM AND FEED THIS LINE OF THINKING. ACCORDING TO THIS THEORY, THE LEGITIMATIZING RATIONALE FOR THE MILITARY REGIME HAS NOW DISAPPEARED. PINOCHET IS CLEARLY SEEN TO BE A ONE-MAN DICTATOR AND HIS SUPPORT WITHIN THE MILITARY AND THE CIVILIAN POPULATION WILL CONTINUE TO ERODE, PERHAPS AT AN ACCELERATING PACE. (COMMENT: A PARTIALLY UNKNOWN AND LARGELY UNCONSIDERED FACTOR HERE IS THE ROLE THAT MATTHEI WILL PLAY IN THE FUTURE. IN ALL ACCOUNTS, HE WILL NOT BE A YES-MAN FOR PINOCHET. LATE LAST YEAR HE IMPRESSED US AS ALMOST EQUALLY CRITICAL OF PINOCHET AS WAS LEIGH. MORE RECENTLY WE HAVE BEEN TOLD THAT HE ALONE AMONG THE AIR FORCE GENERALS WAS WILLING TO TAKE ISSUE WITH LEIGH AT IN-HOUSE AIR FORCE DISCUSSIONS.)

5. THIS VIEWPOINT IS BASED ON THE KNOWLEDGE THAT THE LETELIER CASE INDICTMENTS ARE DUE SOON AND WILL PROBABLY NAME FERNANDEZ, ESPINOZA AND CONTRERAS. THE LEIGH INTERVIEW WITH THE CORRIERE DELLA SERA INCLUDED A REFERENCE TO THE LETELIER CASE AND A THREAT TO RESIGN IF GOC COMPLICITY WERE PROVED (SANTIAGO 5421).

PINOCHET OUSTED HIM FIRST BUT IN SO DOING IMPLICITLY ACKNOWLEDGED
GOC INVOLVEMENT AND, THE PROponents OF THIS LINE WOULD ARGUE,
HIS OWN. MORE THAN A VICTORY, THE OUSTER OF LEIGH IS SEEN AS
AN INDICATION OF PINOCHET'S VULNERABILITY. HOW MATTHEI WILL REACT
TO THE LETELIER INDICTMENTS REMAINS TO BE SEEN.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 SANTIAGO 5598

6. PINOCHET AS HIS OWN WORST ENEMY. IN THE PAST PINOCHET
HAS NORMALLY GIVEN WAY TO HIS BASER IMPULSES WHEN HE HAS GAINED
A VICTORY OF SORTS. HIS UNMEASURED STATEMENTS AFTER THE JANUARY
4 PLEBISCITE AND THE SUBSEQUENT RUSTICATION OF 12 PDCERS TO THE
NORTH ARE RECENT EXAMPLES. IT IS POSSIBLE, EVEN LIKELY, THAT
PINOCHET WILL MAKE SIMILAR MISTAKES NOW AND UNDO SOME OF THE ADVANTAGE
GAINED BY OUSTING LEIGH. FOR EXAMPLE, WE HAVE HEARD THAT THE
PDC IS WORRIED THAT YOUTH LEADER, JORGE PIZARRO, DUE BACK FROM
ITALY NEXT WEEK, WILL BE ARRESTED OR EXPELLED UPON ARRIVAL.

7. IN THIS CONTEXT, PINOCHETISMO REMAINS A THREAT (SEE SANTIAGO
5467). PINOCHET AND HIS ADVISORS MAY SEE THE SUCCESS OF THE LEIGH
OPERATION AS OPENING THE WAY FOR A MAJOR CAMPAIGN TO PERSONALIZE
THE NEW CHILEAN INSTITUTIONALITY IN THE NAME OF PINOCHET. OUR
READING OF LOCAL ATTITUDES IS THAT SUCH AN EMPHASIS WOULD
ALIENATE MANY OF THE MODERATE AND CONSERVATIVE SUPPORTERS
OF THIS REGIME WHO HAVE NOT BEEN PARTICULARLY UPSET BY THE LEIGH
DEPARTURE.

8. MISCELLANEOUS NEWS AND RUMORS. ACCORDING TO YESTERDAY'S "EL
MERCURIO" LEIGH HAS DECIDED AGAINST TAKING HIS CASE TO THE

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COURTS. HE IS QUOTED AS SAYING THAT HE RETHOUGHT THE MATTER CALMLY AND DECIDED NOT TO DO ANYTHING. CONFIRMING OUR IMPRESSION THAT PINOCHET OUTMANEUVERED LEIGH, WE HAVE BEEN TOLD THAT INTERIOR MINISTER FERNANDEZ MET WITH MATTHEI THE AFTERNOON OF JULY 22 TO SEE IF HE WOULD REPLACE LEIGH ON THE JUNTA. AND THAT THE JUNTA MEMBERS, MINUS LEIGH, GOT TOGETHER ON JULY 23. REPORTEDLY THE REASON THAT ALL AIR FORCE GENERALS BUT TWO RESIGNED WAS THAT THEY HAD DISCUSSED WITH LIEGH (AT THE WEEKLY IN-HOUSE AIR FORCE MEETINGS REFERRED TO IN PARAGRAPH 4 ABOVE) ALL OF THE IDEAS EXPRESSED BY LEIGH IN HIS SPEECHES AND INTERVIEWS. HAVING SUPPORTED LEIGH IN TAKING THOSE POSITIONS THEY FELT HONOR BOUND TO SUPPORT HIM IN THE FINAL CONFRONTATION WITH PINOCHET.
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